

## UNIT 1

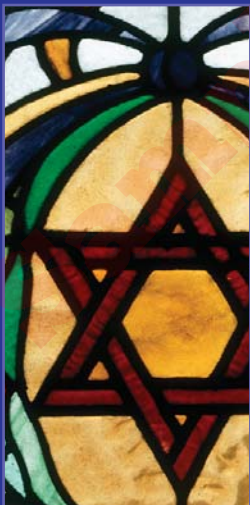
# WHO ARE THE JEWS?

### You will find out

- The name 'Jew' and where it comes from.
- About the faith that Jews share.

### In the glossary

Abraham  
Ark  
Israel  
Menorah  
Monotheist  
Moses  
Sabbath Day  
Star of David  
Synagogue  
Torah



In recent years, the Star of David has been adopted as the universal symbol of Judaism.

The roots of the Jewish faith go back a very long way – well over 4,000 years.

During this time, the Jews:

- Have had their own homeland – **Israel** – but have spent hundreds of years as refugees without a home.
- Were slaves for over 400 years in Egypt during the time of **Moses**.
- Were slaughtered in their millions during the 1930s and 1940s.
- Returned to live in Israel in 1948 after an absence of almost 2,000 years.

Today, there are Jewish communities, large and small, in most parts of the world.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

To understand the world Jewish community, it is helpful to think of it as one very large 'family'. The members of the Jewish family belong to one of the oldest religions in the world. They have not, however, always been known by this name.

1. In the beginning, Jews were known as 'Israelites', from their ancestor, Jacob, who was also known as Israel.
2. Following this, the Jews were called 'Hebrews' after the nomadic tribe of which they formed a part.
3. The word 'Jew' comes from 'Judah', the name of one of the twelve tribes descended from Jacob.

The early names of 'Hebrews' and 'Israelites' have been very important to the Jews because:

- The Jewish scriptures are written in the Hebrew language and most synagogue services are conducted in this language.
- Israel was the name given to the land which God promised to the Israelites after they escaped from slavery in Egypt almost 4,000 years ago. This land was originally known as Canaan but the Jews looked upon it as their Promised Land.





## TEN BASIC FACTS ABOUT JUDAISM

1. Judaism began more than 3,000 years ago in Mesopotamia, the region in the Middle East that is modern Iraq.
2. Jews trace their ancestry back to **Abraham**, the father of their nation, and to Moses, who gave them their faith.
3. There are about thirteen million Jews in the world today.
4. Jews worship one God. This means that, along with Christians and Muslims, Jews are **monotheists**.
5. Jews worship in a **synagogue**.
6. The **Torah** is the most important part of the Jewish scriptures.
7. The scrolls of the Torah, the most precious objects in a synagogue, are kept in the **Ark** - a cupboard at the front of a synagogue.
8. The **Sabbath day**, the seventh day of the week, is a day of rest for all Jews.
9. The best-known Jewish symbols are the six-pointed **Star of David** and the seven-branched candlestick [the **menorah**].
10. Jews have their own calendar, which goes back to the traditional date for the creation of the world. This calendar is 3,761 years ahead of the Western calendar.

The seven-branched candlestick is one of the most important symbols of Judaism.



*If you were to ask me what it is that makes me feel most Jewish, I would say it's when I am with my family in the home. This is much more important to me than the time I spend in the synagogue. In my home, I am surrounded by many reminders that I am a Jew – and proud of it.*

Joseph, 15

### OVER TO YOU ►►►

- 1 Explain the three different names that the Jews have been given and the different reasons for them.
- 2 What is:
  - a) Hebrew?
  - b) Israel?
- 3 Read the comment by Joseph. He explains why he is proud to be Jewish. Put his comment into your own words



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A JEW?

## You will find out

- What 'secular Jews' are.
- What it means to be Jewish.
- The links between Jews in the past and Jews today.

## In the glossary

Abraham  
Bar Mitzvah  
Brit Milah  
Gentile  
Israel  
Pesach  
Prophet  
Rosh Hashanah  
Sabbath Day  
Secular Jew  
Shavuot  
Synagogue  
Torah



In Israel, a person is recognised as a Jew if he or she has a Jewish mother. In other countries, however, someone is a member of the Jewish community if either of their parents is Jewish. Being born into a Jewish family gives a person a special link with other Jews – including those who are long since dead.

It is now over 4,000 years since God first spoke to Abraham and the Jewish faith began. Since that happened, the Jews have believed that they belong to a very special religious faith.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JEWISH?

For most Jews, being Jewish means:

- Believing in the one God who created the heavens and the earth. God made himself known to the world through many **prophets**.
- Keeping the strict food laws and creating a Jewish home.
- Celebrating the Jewish festivals, including **Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and Shavuot**.
- Celebrating different Jewish ceremonies, extending from a person's birth through to their death. These include **Brit Milah** and **Bar Mitzvah** [Unit 15].
- Sharing in the worship and community life of the local synagogue.

*I was born a Jew and I can never lose that. I am very proud of my Jewish heritage. You could argue that Jewish people have given more to the world than any other group. I do not, however, follow any of the Jewish religious practices or festivals.*

Ehud, 28



Almost all Jews are born into the faith.

This stained-glass window commemorates the most important of all Jewish festivals – Pesach or Passover.

## SECULAR JEWS

Today, there are many Jews who do not follow the traditional practices of their religious faith. In particular, they do not:

- Celebrate the religious festivals.
- Observe the Sabbath day.
- Attend worship in the synagogue.
- Follow the special Jewish laws about food and diet.

These people are called Secular Jews. Secular Jews cannot, however, turn their backs entirely on their Jewish heritage since they still have Jewish parents.

## THE JEWISH 'FAMILY'

A non-Jewish person is called a **Gentile**. He or she may have been converted to the Jewish faith but this is highly unusual. Jews do not try to convert other people. The vast majority of Jews were born into the faith. As a result, there is a close link between the Jews of the past and those who are alive today. Jews speak of 'our father, Abraham'.

It is this close link that has led people to talk of the 'Jewish family'. As you will discover in this book, the Jewish faith is all about living in the present. To be a Jew today means following a clear way of life that has not changed in the last 4,000 years. This way of life is laid down clearly in the Jewish scriptures and especially the Torah.

*I was born into a Jewish family and my faith has always been very important to me. I try to live my life by following the principles that I find in the Jewish scriptures. I married a Jewish man and we try to bring up our children to respect the traditions and the practices of our faith.*

Elizabeth, 32



## TAKE TIME TO THINK

Jews throughout the world come from many different backgrounds. What do you think it is that really binds them together into one 'family'?

## OVER TO YOU ►►►

- 1 Read through the comments by Ehud and Elizabeth.
  - a) What name is used to describe Ehud and what does it mean?
  - b) What reason does Ehud give for his pride in being Jewish – although he does not follow the religious practices of the faith?
  - c) How does Elizabeth try to put her religious faith into practice?
- 2 Imagine that you are a Jew. Someone asks you to explain what being Jewish means to you. What answer would you give to them?

## UNIT 5

# THE ASHKENAZIM AND SEPHARDIM TRADITIONS

### You will find out

- The Ashkenazim and Sephardim Jewish traditions.
- The differences between the two traditions.
- The places where the main concentrations of Jews are found.

### In the glossary

Ashkenazim

Israel

Sephardim

Throughout history, members of the Jewish community have been great travellers – sometimes as traders but often as refugees. Over the centuries, there have been Jewish communities in most parts of the world. The different groups of Jews today owe their differences to these early settlements.

## THE TWO MAJOR GROUPS

There are two main Jewish traditions:

- **The Ashkenazim.** These are the Jews from central and eastern Europe. These Jews originally lived in northern France and different German cities along the River Rhine. The name itself is taken from an ancient German tribe. This tradition developed its own language – Yiddish – which is still used by many Jews today and is a mixture of German and Hebrew. Today, most of the Jews living in the USA, Israel and Australia come from the Ashkenazim tradition.
- **The Sephardim.** This tradition comes from the Hebrew word for Spain. These Jews originally came from Spain and Portugal but they fled to other parts of Europe after being expelled from Spain in 1492. This tradition also has its own language – Ladino, which is a mixture of Spanish and Hebrew – but it is rarely used today.

**CHECK IT OUT**

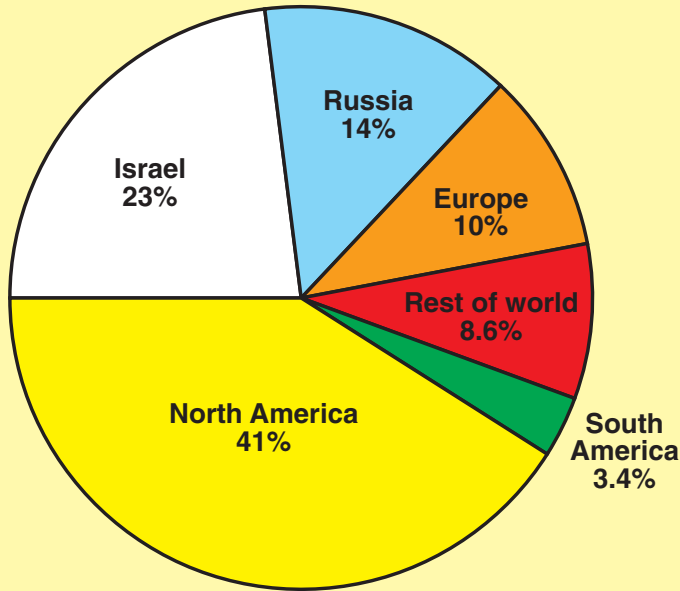


## OVER TO YOU ▶▶▶

- 1 a) What are the two main Jewish traditions?  
b) Write a paragraph to appear in a local paper about these two traditions.  
c) Describe five differences between these two traditions and one thing that they have in common.
- 2 A young Jew said recently, "You would expect to find most Jews living in Israel but you would be wrong." Was he right? Explain your answer.



This shows where the main numbers of Jews are to be found.



## DIFFERENCES

The differences between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim are not ones of beliefs or teachings. They are differences in the words of prayers used; the way of pronouncing Hebrew words; the choice of melodies and chants for public worship and the way in which some customs are carried out.

## THE SPREAD OF THE JEWS

Almost all Jews today are descended from the Ashkenazim and Sephardim traditions. The two largest Jewish communities in the world today are found in:

- **The USA.** There are about 5.5 million American Jews and 2 million of these live in New York alone. A further half million live in Los Angeles.
- **Israel.** About 4.5 million Jews live in Israel. A small community always lived there but many European Jews moved there in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in response to poverty and persecution elsewhere. Many more Jews arrived after the end of the Second World War [1939-45] and after the founding of the State of Israel [1948].

Among this influx of Jews into Israel were many from Iran and Iraq in the late 1940s and many from Ethiopia in the 1980s and the 1990s. You will find out more about the Jewish community in Ethiopia in unit 30. About 300,000 Jews live in the UK, about 200,000 of them living in London and the south-east of England.

These are the cities in the world where the main concentrations of Jews are to be found.

